



Planned Parenthood of Southern New England

Testimony of Arvia Walker, MSW
Community Outreach and Engagement Coordinator
Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, Inc.
In support of Raised HB 5237 An Act Concerning Fair Chance Employment

Senator Gomes, Representative Tercyak and honorable members of the Labor Committee, my name is Arvia Walker, Community Outreach and Engagement Coordinator at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England testifying in support HB:5237 An Act Concerning Fair Chance Employment. Planned Parenthood of Southern New England serves over 64,000 patients yearly for reproductive and sexual health services in 17 health centers across the state. Planned Parenthood believes that every patient that walks through our doors has the right to comprehensive reproductive healthcare and deserves the resources to access that right.

As advocates for reproductive freedom, we know that policies and practices that bar individuals from obtaining employment negatively affect the entire family. According to the Center for American Progress half of the children living in the U.S. have a parent or guardian that has some sort of criminal record. Children in families that are impacted by the criminal justice system face significant obstacles in education and economic achievement, with one report citing that an increase of 3,000 a year in a parent's annual salary can lead to a 17% increase in annual income for a child when they grow up.ⁱ But even with a minor record, family income typically drops by fifteen percent due to the parents' inability to obtain employment.ⁱⁱ In addition to income instability, families with a head of household that have a record are routinely denied housing or face eviction.

74 % of the people we serve fall below 150% of the federal poverty level. We know firsthand, through these patients' stories, the juggling act people have to play each month to pay their bills and meet their basic needs. Without proper housing and economic stability, families cannot survive never mind thrive. When basic necessities are out of reach, it becomes impossible for our patients and communities to prioritize the health care of themselves and their families. As one of the largest reproductive health care providers and advocates it is our duty to center the lives of the patients that we serve every day. When people walk through our doors they bring their whole lives with them, and that includes the weight of their previous criminal mistakes.

Once a person has paid their debt to society they deserve the same FAIR CHANCE at employment and economic success as everyone. And yet we know that criminal record ends up being a life sentence for the entire family. We have an obligation to every person in our state to make sure they have the opportunities to provide for themselves and ensure their families can live with the dignity they deserve. That's why I am urging you to support HB 5237 An Act Concerning Fair Chance Employment and protect the basic rights and health of Connecticut families.

ⁱ Criminal Records Are A Family Sentence: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/criminal-justice/news/2015/12/10/127024/infographic-criminal-records-are-a-family-sentence/>

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

See also: National Employment Law Project: www.nelp.org